

August 2017

Dear Oakhill Parents and Friends

Time

In the first assembly of the term, I spoke to the school about time. Nothing new about this theme but it remains one of the most common 'small talk' topics of modern people, after the weather and traffic, of course. I am delighted that, since my move from Cape Town, I have had very little to report on the latter! In modern society we seem to have reached consensus on one thing around time: we do not have enough of it! This notion of time scarcity is a major cause of anxiety in our daily lives and friction in our relationships - also here at school. Ironically, the perception of time scarcity is actually rooted in our consumer culture of abundance; our modern-day philosophy that more is more. So much on offer; so little time!

I believe that we are so obsessed with time because we have not yet succeeded in multiplying it, while everything else seems to be expanding exponentially - knowledge, technology, opportunity and possessions. We have 86400 seconds at our disposal per day - that's it! No app yet for upgrading to a 100 000-second day. I suggested to the pupils that 86400 seconds per day is ENOUGH, provided that we are mindful of how we spend these. Ironically, it is giving away a portion of this precious commodity that helps us optimise our limited resource of time. I am thrilled that most of our pupils participated in the '67 minutes for Madiba' campaign early this term. This meant an investment of 4020 seconds in someone else's well-being. My challenge to pupils was to continue with the principle by giving at least 10% (402 seconds) of 67 minutes per day to the benefit of someone else, with no expectation of a return on investment for themselves. The truth is that many are already doing this and making a meaningful difference in our community. The June fires showed us how generous our community actually is and we are all aware of many people who are continuing to give of their time, energy and love to help others recover.

Normality

After the trauma of the devastating fires, we were advised to return to normality as soon as possible. This has prompted me to reflect on what 'normality' means for us at school. The truth is that we are so very privileged at Oakhill and that 'normal' for us is quite frankly extraordinary by any stretch of the imagination. Cast your eye over our school website and Facebook page and stand amazed: In the few short weeks since the beginning of term, our staff and pupils have managed to produce an astonishing array of achievements, activities, performances and events in the spheres of academics, music, sport and community work. There are opportunities to be found around every corner at Oakhill. The golden thread through all of these is the enthusiasm and dedication of staff and pupils with the support of parents, colleagues and friends.

There is a flipside to our normality of course. As much as we are progressing with vibrant joy, we are also aware that our school exists in a broader South African and World reality that poses much challenge

to us and our children. The world and our country are in a leadership crisis that is not going to improve in a hurry. Our region is going through a crippling drought that is pushing us closer to the edge, as our stored water supplies are dwindling by the day. So, how do we respond as a school? We have a responsibility to make our pupils aware of the greater reality around them while we encourage and equip them to be participants in the quest for solutions. The Grade 6 class was challenged by their Science teacher, Mr Anderson, with a project to investigate long term solutions for Knysna's water shortage. This is real education, aimed at producing Oakhill leaders who are problem solvers and difference makers, rather than disempowered consumers.

'Successful' consumers

As I observe my own daughter changing too quickly into a teenager, I am becoming more and more aware that our children are haunted by the 21st century definition of success, based on our capacity for consumption. In contrast with the effort of good schools to instill a value system of moderation and delayed gratification, the mass media seems to succeed in convincing most people on the planet that their path to fulfilment runs through 'MORE' and 'NOW': more comfort now, more entertainment now, more pleasure now, more freedom now, more possessions now, more facebook friends now and, of course... more money now! Quantity has trumped quality. While showing care for the environment has become fashionable, advertisers are still encouraging consumers to 'upgrade', 'dispose' and 'replace', rather than conserve, reuse and repair. Even the word 'share' has a new meaning in our modern consumer society. It does not refer to redistributing or taking turns anymore but to broadcasting ourselves on social media where we will be measured by the number of 'friends' who 'like' us. How do we help our young children and adolescents to develop critical thinking skills to gauge the information they encounter everyday... to recognise substance, character and quality? These are some of the questions we seek to answer in our 'unwritten curriculum' at Oakhill, in partnership with you, our parents. On the 21st August, Alister Payne will be sharing some suggestions from his recent research. His presentation is entitled 'Parenting our Techno-Savvy Kids'. Don't miss it!

Women's month

August is women's month and we have certainly remembered this at Oakhill. In the College Assembly last week, Mrs Sharon Brown did an outstanding presentation to help us understand the historical significance of the events that took place on 9th August 1956 when 20 000 ordinary South African women demonstrated extraordinary courage that captured the attention of the world and altered the course of history in this country. "Wathinth' abafazi, wathinth imbokotho!" Nearly sixty years later, women are still the silent backbone of South African society. They are the ones raising our country's children and providing them with a moral compass while male role models are sadly rather thinly spread. We have many female champions in our Oakhill community too and we salute them! How appropriate that one of Oakhill's pupils, Aimee Canny, won the 2017 Junior Sportswoman of the Year award for the Eden region. Read more about this on our website.

Change of season

I am sure you have also noticed how nature is responding to the recent rains and the change of season. We know that the road to recovery after the fires is a long one but it does bring hope to see green shoots of new life appearing everywhere. At school there is also an awareness of the season change as winter sports are drawing to a close. It was a joy to observe the participation, teamwork, development and achievements of our boys and girls on the fields, courts and courses during the winter sports season. I stand amazed at the number of Oakhill pupils who achieved provincial and national sports colours this season. Even more impressive has been the demonstration of sportsmanship that is a distinct characteristic of the Oakhill sports ethos.

Term 3 is the season for music Eisteddfods and stage performances. We are seeing a strong growth in the music participation among our pupils and it shows in Oakhill's involvement in the upcoming Plett Eisteddfod. A large number of bands, ensembles and our Prep Choir will be participating. Towards the end of term we will be entertained by our musicians and actors in the 36 hour Drama Festival as well as the College Music in the Blue and Prep Music productions.

Upcoming events

Although this term has already seen a number of highlights, such as the beautiful matric dance, the rest of term still holds a host of events to look forward to. These include the The SRC Food Evening, the Interact Fashion Show, the Parent Forum with Alister Payne on Parenting Techno Savvy Kids, the Palissander Chamber Choir performance, the Dad's Breakfast and the Teddy Bear's Picnic, to mention but a few. Every single one of these events demonstrates the quality we strive to offer our pupils, parents and the community. Full details are available on the Oakhill website. See you there!

Handing over

Our matrices are in the process of passing the reins of leadership to the Grade 11s and getting ready for their preliminary examinations. We wish them all of the best as they are leaning into the final bend of the school career.

Thank you to each parent, pupil and staff member who keep on loyally supporting our very special school and what we are trying to achieve here!

Kind regards



Jannie de Villiers